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FM AMEMBASSY ULAANBAATAR

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INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5958

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RUEHGZ/AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU 0285

RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC

RHMFIU/HQ EPA WASHINGTON DC 0042

RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP WASHINGTON DC

RHEHNSC/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

RHMFIU/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC

RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ULAANBAATAR 000046

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/CM - D.CITRON; EAP/RSP - R.KURZBAUER; OES/ENV
-H.FINMAN; A/LM/AQM/IP - D.HUNTER; OES/PCI - Ann Covington
EAP - INTERNATIONAL FOR M. ENGLE, M. BAILEY
STATE PASS TO AID/ANE
MCC FOR JIM HALLMARK

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [EMIN](#) [SENV](#) [PGOV](#) [MG](#)

SUBJECT: Mongolia to Host Asian Ministerial Meeting on Environment

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: During the Ambassador's courtesy call on January 24, Mongolian's new Minister for Nature and Environment, G. Shiilegdamba, revealed that Mongolia would host a meeting of North East Asian Environment Ministers in Ulaanbaatar in May. He made clear that this would be the precursor to higher-level meetings on regional cooperation on climate-change issues to take place in the fall in Ulaanbaatar (Note: dates are still pending). Shiilegdamba said the Government of Prime Minister S. Bayar would emphasize greater international cooperation on climate-change issues and environmentally sustainable development, as Mongolia's mining sector grows. The Ambassador recapped recent bilateral cooperative efforts on the environment, including the recent completion of a US \$100,000 EAP/ESF grant to study and publicize the environmental consequences of widespread mercury use in artisanal mining; provisions for environmental-assessment surveys and capacity building under the newly signed MCA Compact; the signing of an MOU between Denali National Park in Alaska and Mongolia's Altai Tavan Bogd National Park; and Nature Conservancy efforts to protect Mongolia's grasslands. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) The Ambassador paid a courtesy call January 24 on Mongolia's new Minister for Nature and Environment G. Shiilegdamba. The Minister, who last served as Vice Minister for Road, Transport and Tourism, thanked the USG for recent efforts to preserve Mongolia's environment. He added that GOM priorities under Prime Minister S. Bayar include a greater focus on environmentally sustainable management of natural resources, and increased cooperation with the international community and donors on key environmental issues. He noted that Mongolia was a party to several international agreements on the environment and said Mongolia intended to host three regional conferences on climate-change issues (a technical meeting in March, a Ministerial meeting in May, and then a high-level meeting in September). He also looked to tap U.S. expertise on assisting with chemical-waste runoffs from mining, and asked for Embassy support for seven environmental projects recently submitted for possible funding through an EAP/ESF grant.

US-Mongolia Cooperation on Environment Issues

¶13. (U) The Ambassador updated the Minister on recent USG and NGO activities aimed at helping Mongolia protect and preserve its environment. The recently signed MCA compact, he said, would provide funding (more than US \$1.5 million) for environmental-impact studies of the four MCA projects. The funds would also train, educate and build capacity for officers at the Ministry for Nature and Environment (MNE) and Customs, which would help mitigate negative environmental impacts from increased illegal logging or rapid mining development that could result from an improved railway system. The funds would also help disposal of hazardous waste as part of the health project, and provide for groundwater surveys for peri-urban grazing and housing development.

¶14. (U) He noted the successful completion of the Mercury Awareness Project, funded through a US \$100,000 grant from the Department's Office of Oceans, Environment and Science. The project helped fund a detailed study of rising mercury levels in areas where artisanal miners are active; it also created a publicity campaign that warned of dangers associated with mercury use. The Ambassador applauded the signing of an MOU during President Enkhbayar's visit to Alaska in October 2007 between the Denali National Park in Alaska and the Altai Tavan Bogd National Park in Western Mongolia, which will increase information exchanges between the two parks. He also spoke about the Nature Conservancy's recently launched program to protect globally significant grasslands of the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia.

Shiilegdamba Bio

¶15. (SBU) Ganhuyag SHIILEGDAMBA (b. 1975) earned a Master's Degree from Maastricht University in Holland in 2004 while serving as Deputy Director of the government's Tourism Authority (2000-2004). In 2004 he was named Vice Minister of Roads Transport and Tourism

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where he served until his recent elevation to Minister of Nature and Environment earlier this year. Except for a one-year stint as Executive Director of his father's "Bayangobi" tourism company (1999-2000) he has no private-sector experience.

¶16. (SBU) At 32 years of age, Shiilegdamba is by far the youngest minister in PM Bayar's Cabinet. Environmentalists complain that he lacks experience in environmental matters and that his appointment is proof that the MNE has little standing or respect within the Government. (Note: Former Industry and Trade Minister Davaadorj refused the position earlier this year, seeing it [correctly] as an attempt by Bayar to demote and marginalize the Republican Party within the Government). Others, however, contend that MNE is a "training wheels ministry," and that Shiilegdamba could be destined for bigger things. He was chosen for the job, many say, because his wealthy father has been a long-time contributor to the MPRP.

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